



NATURAL SCIENCE COLLECTIONS ALLIANCE

1444 I STREET NW SUITE 200 WASHINGTON, DC 20005 TEL: 202 628 1500 WWW.NSCALLIANCE.ORG

June 22, 2012

Dr. John Holdren, Director
Office of Science and Technology Policy
Executive Office of the President
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20502

Dear Dr. Holdren:

On behalf of the Natural Science Collections Alliance, I thank you for the actions your office has taken in recent years to encourage federal agencies to identify and more adequately budget for federally owned scientific collections. These collections and associated data represent irreplaceable chronicles of our natural heritage, are the basis for important scientific discoveries, and are routinely used to formulate natural resource, public health, and environmental policies.

Importantly, the federal government is not the only caretaker of our nation's natural science collections. They are located in our universities, natural history museums, botanic gardens, herbaria, zoos and aquaria. These non-federal collections have specimens and data not contained in federal collections and often hold and care for government-owned specimens – usually at no cost to the federal government.

Federal collections are those initiated by federal agencies and for which the federal government retains ownership. Collections obtained by non-federal scientists who have received federal grants or contract funds for research, such as from the National Science Foundation, National Institutes of Health, or other federal research programs, are not federally owned.

Unfortunately, federal personnel sometimes are unaware of specimens or data housed in non-federal institutions and establish a new specimen-based collection when one or more already exists at a nearby non-federal facility. Establishing a new collection may generate significant costs for taxpayers. It is likely to be more cost-effective for the government to augment an existing collection and compensate the host institution for maintaining the additional specimens, than it is to create a new facility. In addition to reducing costs, the increase in communication between personnel at federal and non-federal collections will create an environment in which government decision-makers are able to make more informed decisions. Public health officials, agricultural inspectors, and Fish and Wildlife Service agents are among the many who will

benefit from increased communication with scientists as well as timely access to biological collections and associated data that inform decisions impacting public health, the environment, and the economy.

In the interest of improved stewardship of taxpayer resources and increased government efficiency, we respectfully request that you direct federal agencies to conduct a cost-benefit analysis prior to establishing a new federal collection. We suggest that no new federal scientific collection be established unless it has been determined that funding an existing non-federal collection to curate the specimens will not be more cost-effective.

Thank you for considering this request. I or other members of the NSC Alliance will be happy to discuss this issue with you or your staff. Please do not hesitate to contact NSC Alliance director of public policy Dr. Robert Gropp at rgropp@aibs.org or 202-628-1500 x 250 if we can be of further assistance on this or other matters related to the nation's natural science collections.

Sincerely,

Larry Page, Ph.D.
President